



# RESCUE

Resources & Education for Stroke Caregivers'  
Understanding & Empowerment

March 2009

[www.va.gov/rorc/rescue](http://www.va.gov/rorc/rescue)



## STROKE CAREGIVING IS NO DAY AT THE BEACH

More than three-quarters of a million Americans suffer a stroke each year, and the numbers continue to rise. It is estimated that four out of five families in the United States are affected by stroke, and 21% of adults provide unpaid care to friends or family that are 18 and older. This means that there is a great chance that someone you encounter today provides informal care for a loved one who has survived a stroke, and that this person faces the daily responsibilities and stresses that come with being a caregiver.

**Resources and Education for Stroke Caregivers' Understanding and Empowerment**, or **RESCUE** for short, aims to provide helpful information about caregiving and its challenges to VA staff, veteran stroke survivors, their family caregivers, and friends. The goal of **RESCUE**, and the VA project that

supports it, is to empower stroke caregivers with information about specific problems and concerns that they (and the veteran stroke survivor) may have after stroke. These topics include physical side effects after stroke, financial issues, and emotional and mental health.

The **RESCUE** name and life preserver logo, used throughout project materials, represent the idea that a caregiver is a "lifeguard," responsible for the safety and well-being of those under their watchful care. Like a lifeguard, a fully prepared rescuer, ready to spring into action, needs the appropriate knowledge, training, and tools to successfully do their job.

This is the first edition of a monthly newsletter designed to disseminate information about stroke caregiving and to keep you informed about the [RESCUE Web site](#), currently in development. The **RESCUE Team** from the VA Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center (RORC) is working to create a comprehensive source of Web-based stroke caregiving resources. The materials will give caregivers confidence that they can be a great caregiver, and support them in their role as an active and proactive care team member.

Read the Web version of this Newsletter for the full story: [www.va.gov/rorc/rescue](http://www.va.gov/rorc/rescue)

### My HealtheVet

RESCUE will be working with the team from VA My HealtheVet (MHV) (the VA healthcare portal), to post the stroke caregiver materials in the My HealtheVet Healthy Living Center for Caregiver Assistance.

Read the Web version of this Newsletter for the full story.

[www.va.gov/rorc/rescue](http://www.va.gov/rorc/rescue)

Visit My HealtheVet today:

[www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)

### Did You Know?

- Each year, approximately 9,000-11,000 veterans are hospitalized for a new stroke.
- It is estimated that 80% of stroke survivors, discharged to home, rely on informal caregivers such as friends and family members.
- Family members of stroke survivors are at higher risk for feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, depression, poor health because of the sudden undertaking of caregiver role.

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### American Stroke Association

The American Stroke Association (ASA) has a vast array of resources and materials specific to stroke caregiving. In addition to the materials developed by our **RESCUE** team, we will be sharing valuable information created by the ASA.

Read the Web version of this Newsletter for the full story.

[www.va.gov/rorc/rescue](http://www.va.gov/rorc/rescue)

Visit the American Stroke Association:  
[www.strokeassociation.org](http://www.strokeassociation.org)





## Resources & Education for Stroke Caregivers' Understanding & Empowerment

### BACKGROUND OF THE RESCUE PROJECT

Constance R. Uphold, PhD, ARNP, Principal Investigator, and the "Web-based Informational Materials for Caregivers of Veterans Post-Stroke" research team (#SDP 06-327) are working to fill the need for stroke caregiver resources in the VA. This implementation project addresses the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Management of Stroke Rehabilitation recommendations for the need to increase guideline compliance in the area of family education. The educational materials being developed for this project will be made available on the Internet via the Resources and Education for Stroke Caregivers' Understanding and Empowerment (RESCUE) Web site, and through the VA My HealtheVet health information portal.

This project is supported by the VA Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI), and the Rehabilitation Outcomes Research Center (RORC) Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP) at the North Florida/South Georgia Veteran Health System (NF/SGVHS) in Gainesville, Florida.



For more information about the **"Web-based Informational Materials for Caregivers of Veterans Post-Stroke"** project, see the **Links in this Issue** box below.

### LOW HEALTH LITERACY

Health literacy is of national and local concern. It is defined in Healthy People 2010 as "the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions." According to a study released from the University of Connecticut, the estimated cost to the United States resulting from low health literacy ranges from \$106 to \$236 billion a year.

Low health literacy is an enormous cost, not only to the health system, but to the caregiver and stroke survivor who cannot access or understand health information. Low literacy levels have been found to exist in approximately 36% of the U.S. adult population. This means that at least one person in three will experience difficulty in making the right health decisions because of their low health literacy.



RESCUE aims to be a "lifesaver" when stroke survivors and their families are drowning in health information that may be hard to understand. Tackling the problem of low health literacy, the RESCUE team is developing fact sheets that are uniformly written at a 7th grade reading level. Through easy to understand fact sheets, we strive to advance patient safety and essentially healthcare quality for stroke survivors and their families.

### Links in this Issue



**RESCUE Web Site  
Caregiver Project Abstract**

[www.va.gov/rorc/rescue](http://www.va.gov/rorc/rescue)  
[http://www.va.gov/rorc/projects/Project\\_Template.cfm?  
Project\\_ID=2141698796](http://www.va.gov/rorc/projects/Project_Template.cfm?Project_ID=2141698796)

**VA My HealtheVet  
American Medical Association**

[www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)  
[http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/  
public-health/promoting-healthy-lifestyles/geriatric-health/  
caregiver-health.shtml](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/public-health/promoting-healthy-lifestyles/geriatric-health/caregiver-health.shtml)

**American Stroke Association (ASA)  
U.S. Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion**

[http://www.healthypeople.gov/Document/HTML/  
Volume1/11HealthCom.htm](http://www.healthypeople.gov/Document/HTML/Volume1/11HealthCom.htm)  
<http://www.strokeassociation.org>

**National Patient Safety Foundation**

<http://www.npsf.org/pr/pressrel/2007-10-11.php>

[www.va.gov/rorc/rescue](http://www.va.gov/rorc/rescue)



*Web-Based Informational Materials for Caregivers  
of Veterans Post-Stroke*

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